

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

***Chicago Tribune* Calls for Passage of H.R. 810, The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act**

May 19, 2005

Dear Colleague:

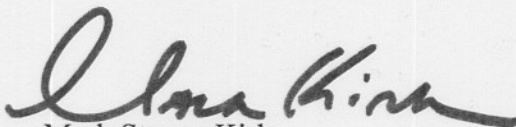
We are writing to call your attention to an editorial in this morning's *Chicago Tribune* (see reverse side) titled "Easing the stem cell limits." The editorial refers to an unofficial ad hoc hearing we held on Monday, May 16th in Chicago. Testifying at the hearing were three leading embryonic and adult stem cell researchers and three patients afflicted by spinal cord paralysis, diabetes, and Parkinson's disease. Each patient's chances for scientific breakthroughs leading to treatments or cures are severely limited by the current embryonic stem cell research policy. Each witness agreed: more embryonic stem cell lines must be made available for federally funded research.

The hearing featured testimony from: Daniel Heumann, Vice President of the Daniel Heumann Fund for Spinal Chord Research, who was paralyzed from the waist down from a car accident as a teenager; Clara Livingston, a child living with diabetes; and Mary Anne Ostrega, President of the American Parkinson's Disease Association-Midwest Chapter, and living with Parkinson's disease.

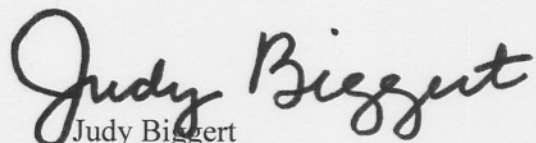
Also testifying were expert stem cell biologists Dr. Steven Teitelbaum, from Washington University, St. Louis; Dr. John A. Kessler, from Northwestern University; and Dr. Sean Morrison, from the University of Michigan.

We have a moral obligation to discover treatments and cures here in the United States. The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, H.R. 810, provides researchers with the necessary resources to hopefully one day cure an array of crippling and fatal diseases. Please contact Jeff Phillips from Rep. Kirk's office (225-4835) or Jaime Vickery from Rep. Biggert's office (225-3515) for more information on embryonic stem cell research or to cosponsor the bill.

Sincerely,



Mark Steven Kirk
Member of Congress



Judy Biggert
Member of Congress

Chicago Tribune

Easing the stem-cell limits

Nearly four years ago, President Bush set limits on federal funding for human embryonic stem-cell research. In a rapidly changing scientific field, that's a long time. In those years, it has become clear that the limits are far too restrictive and may be choking off progress in this promising research.

But the president has resisted increasing pressure to change those limits, which restrict federal funding to a handful of stem-cell lines that existed in 2001. And the ethical debate over the direction and extent of such research rages in Congress and in legislatures across the country.

Next week, a bill that would ease the federal restrictions on stem-cell research is likely to come to a vote in the House. Congress should pass this bill.

This page has not supported an anything-goes approach to embryonic stem-cell research. Specifically, we have opposed research that involves so-called therapeutic cloning or the creation of embryos for research. This bill, however, would lift the federal limits in a responsible way, under guidelines to be established by the National Institutes of Health.

Most important: No embryos would be created for the sole purpose of research. Embryos that were created for reproduction but not implanted—that otherwise would be discarded—would be eligible for the research. That likely includes some of the estimated 400,000 frozen human embryos in storage now, as well as embryos that would be created under similar circumstances in the future. That's worth underscoring: These embryos would be discarded if not used for science.

The bill also wisely sets high standards for such donations. The prospective parents who created the embryos would be required to provide written consent for the donation. They could not be paid or induced in any way to donate.

In recent months, more scientists have begun to speak out about this critical issue. Dr. Elias Zerhouni, the director of the National Institutes of Health, told a panel of senators last month that a policy change to lift the limits could benefit science, an assessment echoed by other top NIH officials.

The current rules allow federal funding of embryonic research only if the stem cells were extracted from embryos before Aug. 9, 2001. The White House estimated some time ago that 60 to 70 lines would qualify for funds. As it turns out, the real number was only about a third of that.

Scientists say those limits rule out 127 recently created stem-cell lines that could have advantages over the older cells, many of which are contaminated with animal tissue and could not be used in people.

Earlier this week, backers of the House bill rallied support for it at an unusual hearing in Chicago. One of the witnesses was Clara Livingston, a 9-year-old diabetes patient who uses an insulin pump to keep her disease in check. Clara's mother, Gretchen, hopes that stem cells, which can be coaxed into forming any type of tissue, could offer a way of replacing the diseased cells that cause diabetes. "Without your help," she said, "my daughter suffers."

Early stem-cell research has given hope to millions of Americans suffering from a wide range of diseases—including Alzheimer's, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries and cancer. This work remains preliminary. No one knows what it may yield. But Congress has a chance to approve an ethical, expanded federal role in funding this promising medical research.